

VZCZCXRO8366  
OO RUEHBI  
DE RUEHLM #0849/01 2530826  
ZNR UUUUU ZZH  
O 090826Z SEP 08  
FM AMEMBASSY COLOMBO  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 8640  
INFO RUEHBK/AMEMBASSY BANGKOK 3443  
RUEHKT/AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU 6240  
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 2250  
RUEHCG/AMCONSUL CHENNAI 8671  
RUEHBI/AMCONSUL MUMBAI 6095  
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 2920  
RHHMUNA/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI  
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 0789

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 04 COLOMBO 000849

SENSITIVE  
SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR SCA/INS AND PRM  
STATE ALSO PASS TO USAID  
AID/W FOR ANE/SCA  
AID/W FOR DCHA/OFDA FOR MHESS, KLUU AND RTHAYER  
AID/W FOR DCHA/FFP FOR JDWORKIN AND MNIMMS  
BANGKOK FOR DCHA/OFDA REGIONAL ADVISOR WBERGER

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PREF](#) [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [EAID](#) [CE](#)

SUBJECT: GSL ORDERS ALL INGOS AND UN OUT OF VANNI FOR  
SECURITY REASONS

1. (SBU) Summary: At the September 8 Consultative Committee of Humanitarian Affairs (CCHA), the Government of Sri Lanka confirmed that all UN and international NGO expatriate staff will have to leave the LTTE-controlled areas effective immediately with their key equipment (vehicles, communications, computers, etc) due to security reasons. The ICRC will be allowed to stay because of the GSL's Geneva Convention obligations. The Government said it was no longer safe for the UN and INGOS to be in the Vanni and said the Government Agents (GAs) will now assume responsibility for distributing all relief to internally displaced persons (IDPs) in LTTE-controlled areas. The Government of Sri Lanka will build a major logistics hub in Vavuniya to which the UN will deliver supplies and the GAs will send trucks to pick it up. The UN asked for three weeks to implement this withdrawal; the Government of Sri Lanka did not agree to that but granted the UN more time. The Ambassador said the INGOS would have an even more difficult time getting LTTE permission to remove their assets and urged the Government of Sri Lanka to be flexible, to which the Defense Secretary agreed. Senior Presidential Advisor Basil Rajapaksa agreed to meet on a weekly basis with the 13 INGOS still in the Vanni and the Ambassador to review humanitarian issues. The Ambassador and USAID will attend the first meeting on Friday.

The Government of Sri Lanka is confident the GAs will be able to handle this increased work; the UN and INGOS are skeptical. Ambassador told the CCHA that if the Government of Sri Lanka expects IDPs to move South into Government-controlled areas, it must do a much better job of reassuring them they will not be mistreated and left to languish in camps as many IDPs from Mannar still are. Basil and Gotabhaya Rajapaksa took the point and agreed. Basil Rajapaksa said a key part of resettling IDPs will be quick demining in the areas liberated from the LTTE. He specifically requested U.S. and Japanese help and promised an assessment of the priority areas soon. In a quick meeting after the CCHA, UN Resident Representative Buhne flagged to the Ambassador that with the departure of UN staff from the Vanni, the UN will no longer be able to monitor the distribution of food and other relief supplies from the US and other donors, some portion of which is likely to be stolen or diverted by the LTTE. The GAs also are likely to rely on the Tamils Rehabilitation Organization for at least some help in distributing relief. The US designated the TRO under E.O. 13224 on November 15, 2007 because of evidence it

acts as a front for facilitating fundraising and procurement for the LTTE. See action request paragraph 9 for USAID. End Summary.

#### All Expats Must Leave LTTE-Controlled Areas

-----

12. (SBU) Minister for Disaster Management and Human Rights Samarasinghe opened the CCHA by briefing on the Government's decision to ask expatriate staff of the UN and all international NGOs to relocate themselves and their equipment (vehicles, computers, etc.) out of LTTE-controlled areas effective immediately. Samarasinghe said this decision was taken to ensure the security of UN and INGO expatriate staff. (Note: the ICRC will be allowed to remain.) He also cited a GSL intelligence report that indicated the LTTE would soon ask all INGO staff to work for the LTTE. Samarasinghe indicated that the Government would consider UN Representative Buhne's request that UN and ICRC be given three weeks to relocate their staff and equipment. Samarasinghe said that the GAs in the Vanni would immediately assume responsibility for distributing relief to IDPs in the Vanni. He further indicated that the Government of Sri Lanka will establish a major hub in Vavuniya where UN and ICRC relief supplies will be delivered for pickup by trucks dispatched by the GAs. He stated the Government of Sri Lanka's commitment to ensure the GAs have whatever they need to ensure their capacity to deliver needed assistance to IDPs. He admitted that the Government can't force IDPs to move south into Government-controlled areas if the IDPs do not want to move. He concluded by asking Sri Lanka's

COLOMBO 00000849 002 OF 004

international partners to continue their strong humanitarian support for IDPs in Sri Lanka.

13. (SBU) Ambassador took the opportunity to tell Samarasinghe, Defense Secretary Rajapaksa, and Presidential Advisor Basil Rajapaksa that the US Embassy had spoken earlier in the day with INGO representatives to get their reaction to the relocation order. He said INGOs had two categories of concern. First, they were worried about how food and other relief supplies would be delivered to IDPs without the assistance of the UN and the other international NGOs. Second, they asked for flexibility in the timetable for evacuating their staff and assets since the LTTE would likely make it as difficult as possible for them to remove vehicles and other equipment. The Ambassador noted that the first question had been answered to some extent by the Minister's presentation, but he requested flexibility on the timetable for the removal of INGO equipment. Defense Secretary Rajapaksa acknowledged that the LTTE would put as many barriers as possible in front of moving equipment. Basil Rajapaksa said he would be chairing a meeting on Friday, September 12 with representatives of the 13 INGOs still in the Vanni to discuss modalities for their orderly departure. He invited the Ambassador to attend that meeting.

#### Safehavens and Humanitarian Corridor

-----

14. (SBU) A representative of the EC Humanitarian office asked whether the Government is considering the creation of safehavens for IDPs in the North and whether it plans to establish a humanitarian corridor to move relief supplies up to the North, if the main A9 road is closed due to hostilities. The Defense Secretary responded that the Government of Sri Lanka plans to provide assistance to IDPs around the town of Puttukudiyiruppu (south-east of Killinocchi). If the A9 is closed the Government will make use of roads to the East to deliver relief supplies. Seeking to relieve what he sensed was anxiety and skepticism about whether the Government and the GAs could take on the full task of delivering humanitarian assistance to IDPs in the North, Rajapaksa said that the Government had done a good job of doing so after liberating the East, and it also managed

capably relief operations for 400,000 who were displaced from Jaffna in the late 1990's (note: in fact the UN and international NGOs played a substantial role in providing relief after the liberation of the East).

¶15. (SBU) The Japanese Ambassador, whom Samarasinghe has invited to participate in the CCHA (perhaps because the Government of Sri Lanka believes Japan will provide a friendly voice), asserted that the safety of IDPs is paramount and that the Sri Lankan military must take special precautions to ensure no civilian casualties. The Defense Secretary responded that the Government of Sri Lanka takes great care to avoid civilian casualties. He remarked that civilians are usually quick to move when military hostilities near their villages. INGO and UN staff are less quick to move, perhaps understandably because they want to continue to provide relief assistance to those in need. This is why the Government felt compelled to order the relocation of expatriate staff from the North, he said.

Need To Reassure IDPs About the Treatment They Will Receive  
-----

¶16. (SBU) The Ambassador pointed out that if the Government hopes to establish a major hub in Vavuniya for IDPs they hope will move South, the Government has to do a better job of reassuring IDPs about the treatment they will receive. He said that reports from various sources in the North suggest that IDPs are reluctant to move South for three reasons: first, the LTTE goes to great lengths to prevent them from moving so they can be recruited for military or labor purposes; second, they want to remain close to their land and families, some of whom may be fighting for the LTTE; and

COLOMBO 00000849 003 OF 004

third, they genuinely fear the treatment they might receive at the hands of the Government of Sri Lanka, both in terms of possible human rights abuses and lengthy quasi-internment in IDP camps as has been the experience for IDPs from Mannar. The Defense Secretary and Basil Rajapaksa took the point that they needed to do a better job of explaining to IDPs they will not be mistreated and that a good step would be to resettle those in the Mannar camp. Samarasinghe interjected that the reason many were still being held was to make sure they were not sleeper LTTE operatives.

Demining Assistance to be Requested from US and Others  
-----

¶17. (SBU) Basil Rajapaksa said the Government already has plans underway to improve the road network, irrigation schemes, and other infrastructure in recently cleared areas, so that IDPs can be resettled as quickly as possible. He indicated, however, that a first priority would be to demine all such areas. He thanked the U.S. and Japanese Governments for the demining assistance they had provided in Jaffna and the East and said the Government of Sri Lanka is undertaking an assessment of demining needs in recently cleared areas in the north, after which the Government of Sri Lanka will request new demining assistance from the U.S., Japan and other countries.

Risk of Diversion by TRO or LTTE  
-----

¶18. (SBU) In a brief conversation after the CCHA, UN Resident Representative Buhne flagged to the Ambassador that with the departure of UN staff from the Vanni, the UN will no longer be able to monitor the distribution of food and other relief supplies from the US and other donors, some portion of which is likely to be stolen or diverted by the LTTE. He said that after the UN itself, the Tamils Rehabilitation Organization (TRO) has the most effective network for distribution of relief in the Vanni. (Note: The US Treasury Department designated the TRO under E.O. 13224 on November 15, 2007 because of evidence it acts as a front for facilitating

fundraising and procurement for the LTTE.) Buhne also said there is a risk that the LTTE could steal or otherwise impound UN-supplied relief for use by the LTTE. Mission will look into this issue in more detail, assess how much relief is likely to be distributed by the TRO or diverted by the LTTE, and then prepare a cable with recommendations for Washington.

Action Request

-----  
¶9. Action Request: Request that USAID Food for Peace, and Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance provide on the ground support to the Embassy and USAID as soon as possible to manage and monitor policy and programmatic issues.

Comment

-----  
¶10. (SBU) The Government of Sri Lanka's decision to evacuate all expatriate staff from the Vanni is likely to significantly complicate and delay delivery of assistance to IDPs in the North. As the Government of Sri Lanka military moves north, larger numbers of inhabitants will swell the estimated 65,000 to 85,000 who have already been displaced. The ability of the GAs to coordinate the massive logistical effort that will be needed is questionable at best. Without the UN and INGOs in the Vanni to provide independent assessments of the humanitarian situation, the LTTE is likely to try to highlight and possibly exaggerate the humanitarian problems as much as possible to energize its fundraising efforts from the diaspora and cast the GSL in the worst light possible. The GSL now has to defend itself from such charges without help from the UN. On a positive note, Basil Rajapaksa acceded to our request to have a weekly meeting to

COLOMBO 00000849 004 OF 004

review the humanitarian situation and assess needs and responses.  
BLAKE